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The situation in the Middle East

Right of peoples to self-determination

Letter dated 27 August 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Further to my note dated 3 July 2007 regarding the inhumane prison conditions being suffered by the Syrian prisoner Bishr al-Maqat and his fellow prisoners in Israeli prisons, I am writing to you concerning the note from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations dated 25 July 2007 (A/61/1014-S/2007/463).

Israel's claims concerning the state of health of the prisoner Bishr al-Maqat are, as usual, false and without any basis in fact. Israel did not do anything for 19 days following the issuance of this delegation's note of 3 July 2007 (A/61/963–S/2007/406), and permitted a doctor from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit him only on 22 July 2007, which is why the Israeli representative did not mention any precise dates or previous visits by an ICRC doctor. This has been confirmed by the information we have obtained from the ICRC representative in Damascus to the effect that a Red Cross doctor visited the Syrian prisoner on 22 July 2007 after learning of his state of health from his family, who requested a Red Cross representative to arrange a visit for them to check on their son's health condition. In other words, doctors' visits were not permitted at all, or occurred rarely and at long intervals. The health of prisoner Maqat (who has been imprisoned for 22 years) has been poor for a long time. We communicated our concerns about his state of health months ago to the Secretary-General and his personal envoy to the Middle East, Mr. Michael Williams. The Representative of Israel should ask his Government to provide him with accurate information, not false information intended to distort the facts and mislead the international community. He should take care to be accurate and truthful and give precise dates when addressing a letter to the Secretary-General that purports to deny the charges in our letter. Otherwise, his letter would seem to be intended merely to deceive the international community.

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My country's delegation calls on you, and through you on the United Nations and its relevant organs, to apply pressure on Israel to allow representatives of the Red Cross to visit prisoner Maqat accompanied by doctors qualified to provide the necessary treatment immediately and perform a surgical procedure on him under the supervision of the ICRC. The catheterization he has already undergone targeted two arteries, but there is still a third blocked artery that is not functioning. This has been confirmed by medical reports as well as by the prisoner's family.

My country's delegation asks for visits by Red Cross representatives to follow up on the prisoner's state of health to be made periodically and regularly, and not just when the subject is raised by us in the media or at the United Nations. This would be in accordance with the 1949 Geneva Conventions and treaties on prisoners of war and civilian persons living under occupation. We recall that it was just such inhumane prison conditions and failure by the occupation authorities to provide timely medical treatment to Syrian prisoners that led to the death of the Syrian prisoner Hayil Abu Zayd in 2005.

In view of the foregoing, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic stands ready to provide the necessary treatment to prisoner Bishr al-Maqat at its own expense in any other country to which he might be transferred.

My country's delegation wishes the present letter to be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 13 and 66, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja`afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative